

02.26.10 Rep. Costa and Cardoza Response To Salazar Water Announcement

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congressmen Jim Costa (D-Fresno) and Dennis Cardoza (D-Merced) issued the following statement regarding the Interior Department's announcement on agricultural water allocations from the federal Central Valley Project.

In announcing this year's allocation, the Interior Department said it will obtain an additional 8 to 10 percent of water through various actions that have yet to be taken. The Interior Department stated that it was optimistic that the allocations would increase even further assuming normal weather conditions, providing up to a 40-percent allocation.

Said Congressman Costa: "I recognize the continuing efforts of Secretary Salazar and his team in addressing the ongoing drought. However, the fact remains that you can't take a press release to the bank for a loan to start planting crops. This is the problem facing our farmers right now. If the weather cooperates, the possible 40 percent water supply allocation is good news. The big "if" is whether or not the Department of Interior will do everything in their power to provide it."

"I too am hopeful that it will keep raining," said Cardoza. "However, our farmers need to make planting decisions today, not in May or June. They cannot take 5 percent to the bank and expect to receive financing to plant their crops. The Department believes their hands are tied ... as we have long said, that is what happens when biological opinions are not based on sound science and are instead based on laws that put fish above farmers and farm workers."

Congressmen Costa and Cardoza have been working with Senator Dianne Feinstein on an amendment that would ensure a 40 percent water allocation. However, officials from the Interior Department had indicated they would be able to reach that target through administrative measures, rather than through new legislation. After multiple years of drought and regulatory cutbacks, many Valley farmers have said that they will not survive another year with reduced supplies.

"Secretary Salazar must recognize that the increase in water supply is worthless if our farmers receive it months from now," said Costa. "As we speak, farmers are putting plans together for this upcoming growing season. Further delays are unacceptable and will keep our farmers from doing what they do best: putting food on America's table and creating jobs for some of the hardest working people in the country," said Costa.

Added Cardoza, "We need a minimum guarantee and we will continue to work with the Interior Department to ensure that the additional supply that has been identified will in fact come to fruition in a timely manner."

Both Cardoza and Costa expressed their appreciation for Senator Feinstein's efforts.

"I am grateful for her advocacy and support. The progress we've made to date would be impossible without her efforts," said Cardoza.

"I appreciate the efforts and service of Senator Feinstein," Costa said. "As long as acres of farmland continue to be fallowed and workers remain unemployed, I reserve the right to push the emergency water supply legislation I have been working on with Senator Feinstein and Congressman Cardoza and do whatever it takes to bring more water to the Valley."